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SERMONS OF JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

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MAN DOTH NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE.

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SERMONS OF JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

In order to supply the demand for Dr. Clarke's sermons in convenient form for distribution, this publication will be continued for the present, the selection of sermons being made by Mrs. Clarke.

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Man doth not Live by Bread Alone.

"Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." — DEUT. viii. 3; MATT. iv. 4; LUKE iv. 4.

LIFE, in its fullest sense, is an activity proceeding from within, though fed from without. These two factors always go to the result. It is an inward force sustained by outward conditions.

As you go home to-day, some of you will pass the great elm on the Common. Its vast limbs and multitudes of branches are bare. It looks dead, but it is not dead. When spring comes, a million of buds will open into leaves; and their flickering shadows will fall during the long summer hours on the grass below. There is in that old tree some mysterious principle of inward life, ready to reappear when the outward conditions are presented to it.

Yet what that life is no physical analysis can discover. Open the trunk, dissect it to its core, examine it with the most powerful microscope, subject it to every test in the laboratory of the chemist, and it evades every research. It is an immaterial principle, since, though active in every part of the living plant, it is yet imperceptible to the senses or to any physical test. This is just as true of the lowest forms of vegetable life as of the highest forms of spiritual life. The senses can no more perceive the life in protoplasm than the life in the soul of Dante. Life, wherever it exists, can neither be seen, felt, touched, nor tasted. It has neither dimensions nor weight; neither

form, color, nor any other characteristic of matter. And, since all we know of matter is *that it has these sensible qualities*, we are obliged to conclude that the principle of life, even in a fungus or a lichen, is an immaterial principle. So we say that life is an immaterial principle dependent on material conditions.

Animal life is higher than vegetable life. The life of the plant can do nothing but make it grow, and unfold into stalk, leaf, flower, and fruit. But the principle of life in an animal gives it more freedom and variety of activity. It can come and go. It has senses. It has intelligence. It has wonderful instincts. It is capable of affection and choice. But it is also dependent on material conditions, and more dependent than that of the plant. The plant needs only soil and sun and moisture. The animal needs variety of food, shelter, society, and various opportunities. The plant lives by sun and rain and earth *only*. The animal requires more than these.

The higher the life, the more of external help it needs for its development. Man, the highest of all, does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. In order that a man shall really *live*,— live a really human life, and not a mere animal life,— he needs culture, knowledge, affection, work, nature and art, society and solitude; for man is not wholly alive when his body is alive, but when his soul also is alive. How much goes to the life of the soul! Thought, love, a strong purpose, a deep conviction, an interest in things and men, something to do, something to live for, a sense of progress, a sense of accomplishment,— these make us alive. A poet in a garret, cold and hungry, but with a soul full of images of divine beauty, and a great hope in his heart of creating a work which the world will not willingly let die, is more alive than he who, possessing every bodily comfort, has nothing in his empty mind and heart. The half-starved inventor, who is carrying in his mind the plan of the steam-engine or a steamboat which is to revolutionize society, of the daguerreotype

which is to revolutionize art, is more alive than the woman who has her dresses and her amusements to think of, but nothing more. The greatest part of our life comes from the soul, not the situation. Only make the soul alive, and we are alive.

And the human soul requires for its food, to keep it in full life, a great variety of nutriment. It lives by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God.

Nature is one of these words. The grandeur, tenderness, variety, harmony of nature, are divine words, in which are life; and this life is the light of man. It is not necessary to visit Niagara or the Alps, the cañons of Colorado or the Yosemite Valley, in order to be fed by this heavenly food. He who loves nature enjoys it and is refreshed by it in its every phase. To the most crowded streets of a city there comes the beauty of dawn and eve, sunrise and sunset. Into every garret which faces south the glorious sun pours a flood of radiance which fills it with rejoicing life. Over the head of the tired laborer, returning to his home at night, hang Orion and the Pleiades, Sirius and Arcturus. Little children in the courts and lanes see the wonder of falling and drifting snow and prismatic colors of the icicle. How these sights of nature feed the soul, and make a large part of its life! They become a portion of its fibre and texture; they constitute a reserved fund on which to draw in hours of gloom; they make life seem richer, larger, more hopeful; they bring us near to God in his creative energy, and so feed our life at its roots.

Human society and intercourse with man constitute another word of God by which we live. God has made men different, has divided them by language, race, class, creed, culture, that by this very variety they may feed each other's souls. It is a mistake to confine ourselves to one set or circle: we need to know all sorts of people in order to be fully alive ourselves. The man or woman grows narrow in mind and heart who sees

only the same people year by year. Travel does us good, and renews our life by bringing us in contact with those we do not see at other times. Any work which takes us out of our own limited sphere and puts us in natural relations of thought and action with new and different persons makes us more alive. A church which brings together all kinds of men and women on the common platform of humanity helps us in the same way. I think that the chief good of going to church is not to hear a sermon, but to meet with our fellow-men on the broad basis of universal needs, to unite with them in prayer and praise to a common Father. Spiritual life may come to us through the pulpit, but also from those who sit by our side, if there is in the congregation a spirit of reverence and brotherhood. No one lives to himself. We all depend on each other, and he who has the widest range of human sympathy receives back the largest measure of life. He gives, and it is given to him again.

We live also by *love*. He who loves no one and is loved by no one is only half alive. He has a name to live, and is dead. We need the daily bread of human affection. Little children are fed by the love of father and mother. Brothers and sisters who love each other communicate life to each other. "Better a dinner of herbs," says the prophet, "where love is, than the stalled ox and hatred therewith."

Here is a family living in luxury. They have all that wealth can buy. The wife and daughters have fine dresses and jewels, equipages and rich furniture. The sons have their horses and dogs, their clubs and journeys to Paris. But, somehow, the atmosphere of the house is cold. There is no natural confidence, no dependence on each other, no little expressions of affection, no thoughtfulness for each other's needs. They do not know what is passing in each other's hearts: they have not taken pains to do so. The husband has given his wife everything except his love. This poor family is starving in

the midst of seeming luxury,—starving for a little genuine affection,—their souls half dead for want of a little love.

I once found in a Western city by the river a sick girl who had been taken out of the street by a poor woman who kept a dining-room for sailors, with a kitchen behind it, and who made a little bed for the sick girl in the kitchen under a stairway. We thought the girl would be more comfortable in a hospital, and we took her there. She did have more comforts; but she missed the kind heart of the motherly old woman, and so went back to die in the kitchen, happier, amid all its discomforts, because she could see the motherly smile and feel the kind, motherly hand of this poor woman, who never went to church and did not think herself a Christian, but who, I think, must have been surprised, when she reached the other world, to hear the Master say, "Inasmuch as you did it to the poorest of these my sisters, you did it to me."

When I go into a hospital or an asylum or a poorhouse or a home for the insane or for orphans, I always look to see if they have any of this sunshine of affection, this food of love provided for them. You can tell in a moment whether it is there or not. Its presence shows itself in freedom, cheerfulness, an aspect of content and courage. Its absence is made known by chill manners and formal rules, by the depressed looks and hopeless aspect of the inmates. How can sick people get well unless they have love with their treatment? How can insanity be cured but by this balm of healing? This is better than all medicine for diseases, both of body and mind.

Every kind of truth, also, is a word which comes from God to make us more alive. We live by feeding on new truth. The mind needs to be nourished with new thoughts, and God sends them to us in various ways. Cowardice and habit dread these new words from God: they are afraid of new discoveries in science; they cling to the letter of the Bible; they fear advancing light. Science searches the glaciers of Switzerland and

Greenland, and finds in them the history of past epochs, of enormous periods of time in which the world was making. Science deciphers the hieroglyphics of Egyptian tombs, and the wedges on the stones of Nineveh, and compares the roots of ancient languages, and digs up out of the ground the stone hatchets and hammers of a primeval age, and so patiently reconstructs the history of a pre-Adamite race of men. These things also are words proceeding out of the mouth of God, which there is no need to be afraid of.

The best test of religious truth is that it feeds the soul. I once heard a man say to another, "You ought not to go to that church: they are heretics there." But the man, sagacious though uneducated, replied, "I know when I am fed." We need to pray to the Lord, "Feed me with food convenient for me." One man is best fed where there is a great deal of ritual and form and ceremony: that suits the state of mind he happens to be in. If he feels better for it, more devout, lifted above worldliness, that is the food convenient for him. Another is best suited by the greatest simplicity, by a Quaker-like absence of form. Let him worship that way, if he worships in spirit and in truth. One man can eat everything; "another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; nor him that eateth not judge him that eateth."

The true food for the soul, in all churches, is the same. It is that which makes us feel God's presence and our responsibility, which arouses the conscience to a sense of duty, makes us feel the majesty of law, the evil of sin, the distinction between right and wrong. It is that which makes us also see the infinite tenderness and pity of our heavenly Father, his readiness to help us in all our needs, his forgiving love, and the comforting influence of his spirit. It is that which makes us find in Jesus a friend, brother, leader, teacher, guide; a Saviour from sin and evil, an inspiration and example for all

good. Wherever and whenever we receive this, it is the word which comes from God's mouth.

Another word which proceeds out of the mouth of God is Goodness, and we live by the sight of goodness.

Wretched and starved is that soul which does not believe in good men and women. Starved is that theology which denies the reality of human truth and human love. Some men, who call themselves men of the world and think themselves wise, disbelieve in the reality of disinterested generosity and manly honesty. Better die, and hide in our graves from the sight of sun and sky, than hold such a wretched unbelief. One may blaspheme God and be pardoned. We cannot hurt God by anything we say against him. One may blaspheme Christ and be forgiven; so he himself has said. But not the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Goodness, not goodness itself, as God shows us goodness in man, woman, and child. He who blasphemes that has no forgiveness. He must expiate that sin by its natural punishment,— which is, to be alone in the cold, away from all truth and all love.

But, fortunately, not many fall into that heresy. We all of us have seen and known good men and women in whose lives some word of God's divine goodness spoke to our soul. What loyalty to truth have we not known in those who could suffer, but could not be false to their own convictions! What honest men have we not known, who could die, but would not deceive! What generous souls have we not been blessed with the sight of, ready to give time, thought, strength, means, to some good cause not their own, forgetting themselves in others! What pure hearts have we not known, Israelites indeed, in whom was no guile! Pure, unspotted infancy, childhood, youth, wearing their robes of simplicity and innocence, white as those of angels! Woe to us, if we doubt these things, in order to seem wise and knowing; for our life is fed out of these fountains of goodness, we live by these words of God.

High friendships, noble loves,— these are words which proceed out of the mouth of God. Not passion, not whim, not fancy; not a mere clinging habit of dependence. Poets compare love to the vine which clings to the elm, and so make dependence its essence. But love which is only dependence is not love. Love is giving and taking, finding and seeking again: it is not blind feeling, but clear sight of good. It is the eye of the seer, which can look through the surface to the centre of the soul and see its real capacities and qualities. False love sees only the surface, and is the dupe of superficial qualities. But true and noble love looks to the soul itself, and recognizes there the original word of God, the stamp and seal of an immortal essence; sees qualities and powers ordained from the foundation of the world, and so does not cling and depend, but reverences and admires. It does not weaken us, but strengthens us, and teaches us how to give as well as to receive. It sees something immortal in the soul, and, loving that, becomes itself immortal. Thus it is a source of life to us. We live by the sight and love of noble minds and hearts with whom we are allied in mutual confidence and help. What is life worth except we have friends? How starved and empty it is unless we can love and be loved! This is also another word proceeding out of the mouth of God.

Grief, also, and death,— solemn angels,— come as words of God and make us live. "Dying, and behold we live." Defeated, baffled, cast down, disappointed, we find in all these seeming evils the seeds of a higher life. Luxury and continued prosperity are like the long summer's day, which takes our strength out of us. Adversity is the cold, healthy air of the mountain top, where among frozen glaciers and terrific precipices and awful abysses our power of body and presence of mind seem to increase. When the dearest friends go from us,— father, mother, child, wife,— behold! the heavens are opened. We are lifted to a grander vision and purpose. The

angels surround us. The air is full of holy memories and great hopes. What an inspiration comes from the sight of death and eternity! Our friends come back to us transfigured, "part of our life's unalterable good," "secure from change in their high-hearted ways." So we are lifted to a higher plane of being; and we find all loss and anguish and bereavement the words of God, by which we live.

Jesus tells us, as Moses before had said, that we live by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God. Thus he rebukes narrowness and bigotry, which would make him the only word of God. He wishes us to hear God's voice in nature, in history, in life, in friendship, in love, in life and death. We live a true life, we grow and become strong to do and bear, as we find something of God in all these,—something divine. Yet, most of all, is Jesus himself the Word of God. That wonderful life, so simple and natural, yet so deep and high; Son of God in its lofty communion with Deity, Son of Man in its tender sympathy with humanity; that life so brave that it unhesitatingly accepted every work as it came, yet so modest that it went by the lowliest ways and the simplest paths.

That life continues to be the bread of heaven and the food of the world. By it we live in faith and hope; we believe in God as near and helpful, though we do not see him; by that life God seems to us our father, and man appears to us a brother; by the life of Jesus this world seems rich and good, and the next world better. As we feed on that life, we find it to be the best word of God, and we are nourished by it and made strong. Man eats angels' food. This is the bread which came down from heaven.

Prosaic Jews and prosaic Christians have wondered that Jesus should say, "Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you." Prosaic Jews took it literally, and said, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Prosaic Christians took it literally, also, and made a

doctrine of Transubstantiation, and said that we eat Christ when we partake of the Lord's Supper. But this is not the only way of eating Christ. We eat the flesh of the Son of Man when we make his truth and his love a part of our own souls. We eat and drink Christ when we assimilate his life and make his spirit ours. Whenever we "are about our Father's business," whenever we pray that "God's kingdom may come" here below, whenever we go about doing good, whenever we rise above ceremony, creed, ritual, into communion with the living God, whenever we love and honor what Jesus loved and honored, and trust in God as he trusted in God, and have that large, far-reaching hope which he had, then we eat and drink Christ.